

Special Health Care Needs: Administrative Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

The demand for school nursing services has increased in recent years because of increasing numbers of students with special health care needs. This influx has occurred, in part, due to the following changes:

- Advanced medical technology has led to improved survival rates and longer life spans of children with special health care needs.
- Hospitals are discharging children earlier to home and to school while they are still receiving treatment.
- There is a growing trend toward placement of children with severe disabilities in integrated community settings, including their homes or specialized foster parent homes, rather than in institutions.

As a result, special procedures requiring nursing skills such as suctioning tracheostomies, catheterizations, and others are now being requested in the schools—an educational setting, not a medical setting.

These trends are supported by federal statutes, which pertain to the treatment of children with disabilities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against children with handicapping conditions, or children who are regarded as handicapped, by recipients of federal funds. School districts must make reasonable accommodations to make their programs and services available to such children. Section 504 provisions are important because the definitions of

children with handicapping conditions is broader than the definition of such children under Public Law 94-142, now known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Thus, a child may be eligible for certain services under Section 504, but not be eligible for special education under IDEA. Section 504 does not require an Individual Education Program (IEP) but does require a written plan. (See Appendix F.1 for *Sample Accommodation Form* on page 40.) It is recommended that the district document that a group of individuals familiar with the student's needs met and identified the needed services.

IDEA is the second federal statute that pertains to the issue of school health services. This statute requires local school districts to provide a “free appropriate public education” for eligible children through the provision of special education and related services. Related services have been defined by regulation and by court decisions to include school health services. Criteria for required services include:

1. Can be learned in a reasonable amount of time.
2. Should not require the presence of a physician, medical judgment from extensive medical training, or an undue amount of time to perform.
3. Must be provided or performed during the school day for the pupil to attend school or benefit from his/her educational program.
4. Must be ordered by a licensed physician or surgeon.

The variety of procedures described in these guidelines would clearly be included in the definition of school health services under IDEA; and therefore, may be the responsibility of school districts to provide when they are determined to be necessary for a child with a disability to benefit from the special education program, as determined by the Individual Education Program (IEP).

Quality health care is in the best interest and safety of the students and supports the optimal educational experience. This health care is best provided in the school through assessment, planning and monitoring by a registered nurse, in collaboration with the student's primary physician. Districts enrolling students with complex medical conditions must have access to this type of health care management in order to safely provide for the student's special needs.

Purpose

These administrative guidelines have been developed in order to assist school districts who serve students with complex medical conditions in making informed decisions regarding the delivery of health services at the school. Students with complex medical conditions may be medically unstable, have unpredictable responses to medication or treatment, may need care requiring professional judgment to modify a necessary procedure, or require medication at school. This type of care should be managed by a registered nurse and may include activities that cannot be delegated. Students with non-complex medical conditions may require procedures that can be performed safely as outlined in specific procedural guidelines, with no need for alterations requiring medical judgment. This type of care could be delegated to properly trained personnel. (See Appendix C.1 for the *National*

Association of School Nurses Position Statement on Case Management of Children With Special Health Care Needs on pages 29-30 and Appendix C.2 for the *National Association of School Nurses Position Statement on School Nurse Role in Care and Management of the Child With Diabetes in the School Setting* on pages 31-32.)

Determination of Services Required

Districts without school nursing services should consider contracting with the local community health nurse to provide assessment, determine required services, and identify who can safely provide the care. This determination is based on the nurse's evaluation of a number of variables specific to each student. These variables include, but are not limited to:

- Number of medications, action, dosage, side effects of each drug, and route of administration.
- Utilization of medication on an as-needed basis (PRN).
- Nature, frequency, and complexity of prescribed treatments the student requires and the assessment needed for PRN treatments.
- Complexity and acuteness of the observations and judgments the caregiver must make.
- Stability of the student's medical condition, i.e., can the student's condition change dramatically to life threatening within a few seconds/minutes?
- Current specialized knowledge base and proficiency of psychomotor skill required by the proposed caregiver.
- Specific student's ability to communicate his/her needs to the caregiver.
- Level of preparation and experience of the designated direct caregiver.

Identification of Care Providers

A *Technical Skills Chart* (See Appendix F.2 on pages 41a-h) will assist school districts in clarifying the roles of the school nurse and other school personnel who might be directly involved in providing the health care requested in the school setting.

School districts without the services of a registered nurse should use the Technical Skills Chart in determining what additional personnel would be needed to safely provide for the care of a student with special needs. Special care procedures also include the administration of medication. Factors to be considered when determining who can safely provide these services include:

- Stability of student's condition.
- Complexity of task.
- Level of judgment and skill needed to safely alter the standard procedure in accordance with the needs of the student.
- Level of judgment required to determine how to proceed from one step to the next.

Competencies of Personnel

The registered nurse should take the responsibility to determine who is competent to provide needed care. See Appendix F.3 on pages 42-43 for a description of the competencies recommended for different levels of personnel. The delegation and supervision by registered nurses of unlicensed assistive personnel (UAP) assisting with the student's care is a major concern and is controlled by the Missouri State Board of Nursing and the Board of Healing Arts. The Technical Skills Chart indicates those procedures which should never be delegated. The registered nurse,

by law, can perform those procedures for which she has the skill and education. In some of the more complex tasks, there will need to be training for the registered nurse provided by a physician, clinical nurse specialist from the tertiary care center, and parents/guardian. Parent(s)/guardian(s) have learned to perform the procedures required by their child and take the responsibility for their care 24 hours a day. They should be involved in the selection and training of school personnel to whom this care is delegated, indicate that they understand who will perform the procedure and be satisfied with the mastery of the care provider. (See Appendix C.3 for the *National Association of School Nurses Position Statement on Using Assistive Personnel in School Health Services Programs* on pages 33-34, Appendix C. 4 for the *Missouri State Board of Nursing Position Statement on Utilization of Unlicensed Health Care Personnel* on page 35, Appendix C.5 for *The National Association of State School Nurse Consultants, Inc. Position Statement on Delegation of School Health Services* on pages 36-37 and Appendix C.6 for the *National Association of School Nurses Position Statement on Delegation* on pages 38-39.)

Documentation of Plan of Care

It is essential to have a "Health Care Plan" for students with significant special needs. (See Appendix F.4 for a *Sample Individualized Health Care Action Form* on pages 44a-d) This plan serves as a written agreement with the student's parent(s)/guardian(s), health care provider, and school personnel and outlines how the district intends to meet the student's health care needs. This plan is different from the Individualized Health Care Plan designed for nursing intervention. The Action Plan provides for effective and efficient planning and protects both the student and

school personnel. Components of the Health Care Action Plan should include:

- Pertinent information about the student, i.e., names of parent(s)/guardian(s), addresses and phone number(s).
- List of key personnel, both primary care providers and school personnel.
- Emergency information.
- Emergency plan (potential child-specific emergencies).
- Background information, i.e., medical history, summary of home assessment, self care, family and life style factors, baseline health status, required medications and diet, and transportation needs.
- Licensed health care provider's order for medications, treatments or procedures.
- Parent(s)/guardian(s) authorization for specialized health care.
- Plan for specific procedures, with list of possible problems.
- Daily log for procedures.
- Documentation of training, if procedures are delegated.

Students who are in special education and have an IEP should have their Health Care Action Plan referenced in the IEP, and components may be incorporated in the IEP if there are services or learning needs that are appropriate for inclusion.

Emergency Plan

The needs of a technology-dependent child may require that written protocols be developed to address possible medical emergencies the student may experience while in the school setting. These protocols will be part of the Health Care Action Plan. The protocols would include:

- Definition of a medical emergency for this child.
- List of individuals to be notified when the emergency occurs.
- Identification of person who will initiate and direct the action to be taken.
- Specific action to be taken in this emergency.
- Transportation procedures.

These student-specific emergency plans should be shared with teaching staff and other school personnel, including ancillary staff such as cafeteria workers, custodians, and bus drivers. (See Appendix F.5 for *Sample Emergency Plan Form* on page 45). If the student is transported, specific training and plans should be provided to bus driver (See Appendix F.6 for *Sample Transportation Plan for Student With Special Health Care Needs* on pages 46-47).

Guidelines for Developing Health Care Action Plans

Purpose

Enrollment of students with special health care needs in the school setting presents a challenge to students, families and school staff. Development of a health care action plan provides for effective and efficient delivery of services that promote school success for the student and reduces the liability of the school district.

Responsibilities

A. Parent/Guardian

The parent/guardian has the most information regarding the unique needs of their child and they should play a major role in the development of the health care action plan. This role includes:

1. Being an advocate for their child.
2. Providing access to health care providers for information and orders for the medications and treatments, as necessary.
3. Participating in the identification and training of providers in the school setting for child-specific procedures.
4. Approval of the health care and emergency plans.
5. Notifying the school nurse of changes in the student's condition, health care providers or health care needs.

B. Administrator

1. Review the appropriate health and education assessment to determine the needs of the student in the school setting.

2. Provides adequate staffing to address the student's education, transportation, and health needs.
3. Provides time and support for training of registered nurses and other staff, as necessary.
4. Informs the Director of Transportation of the student and potential needs for health care. Provides a copy of the Emergency Plan and arranges for any needed in-service.
5. Manages potential environmental concerns such as:
 - Informing all personnel, including lunchroom and playground staff, of potential environmental concerns.
 - Special equipment needs, such as a wheelchair ramp.
 - Extermination of insects to safeguard students from possible insect bites and stings.
 - Emergency power supply for life-sustaining equipment.
 - Appropriate outlets for health care equipment.
6. Knows the potential need for available emergency medical services.
 - Local emergency unit – level of training.
 - Response time.
 - Cost of transportation.

- Flight rescue available – cost, time from hospital.
7. Communicates with parent(s)/guardian(s):
- Need to participate in developing plan, expressing concerns.
 - Expected costs and who will be responsible.
 - Ensures parent(s)/guardian(s) have supplied the necessary emergency information.

C. School Nurse

1. Reviews emergency and/or health information and determines which students will require a health care action plan.
2. Obtains significant health data on identified students.
3. Completes a nursing assessment and summarizes data. This data base should include:
 - Age of student at onset of condition.
 - Description of condition/course of illness.
 - Summary of treatment.
 - Other significant illness, allergies.
 - Date last seen by primary health care provider for noted condition.
 - Name, address, and phone numbers for care provider.
 - Significant emergency information for the Emergency Plan:
 - a) What constitutes a medical emergency for this student?

- b) Preferred hospital.
- c) What orders, supplies or medications are needed for this medical emergency?

- Health care procedures including:
 - a) Orders for medication and treatment.
 - b) Identification of care provider.
 - c) Needed equipment.
 - d) Responsibility for maintenance of equipment. (See Appendix F.7 for *Care of Equipment Form* on pages 48-49.)

4. Secures signed release of confidential information for all sources of significant medical information.
5. Develops and implements the health care action plan to be carried out at school. This plan should include situations that might arise while the student is on the bus, on field trips, during safety drills, and in the event of a disaster. This plan should include the following components:
 - Student identification data and date of plan.
 - Description of the health condition and possible effects on this student. If multiple problems exist, list each as a separate problem in the action plan.
 - General guidelines for determining action.
 - Procedures to be followed.
 - School personnel to be trained in child-specific procedures and problem management.

- Typed plan, signed by nurse, parent(s)/guardian(s), and administrator.
6. Sends Health Care Plan to physician for review and comments. (See Appendix F.8 for *Sample Letter to Physician Regarding Health Care Plan* on page 50.)
 7. Files health care plan in student's record and notes on emergency card that a health care action plan is on file.

This information was taken from the:

Manual for School Health Programs, May 2000, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in cooperation with the Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services.

To review the complete manual, visit their website at:

<http://www.dese.state.mo.us/divimprove/curriculum/hp/manualshlhealth/manualindex.html>